



Working together to combat manipulation

Protecting the European elections from hybrid threats, including disinformation

Why is it necessary to protect the European elections?

From 6 to 9 June 2024, the citizens of the European Union (EU) will go to the polls to vote for the European Parliament for the tenth time. In Germany, the elections will be held on Sunday, 9 June.

Elections are the very heart of democracy, which means they deserve particular protection. Most of all, elections must be shielded from foreign interference.

Some states, often with autocratic governments, make targeted attempts to influence voting behaviour and to call into question the legitimacy of our elections in order to weaken citizens' trust in democratic processes and institutions.



The term hybrid threat covers a range of tactics deployed by foreign governments to exert illegitimate influence on other states. By means of the coordinated deployment of a range of instruments such as disinformation and cyberattacks, sometimes executed by non-state actors, these foreign governments try to push through their own objectives, against our interests and values.

What is the Federal Government's assessment of the hybrid threat situation in the run-up to the 2024 European elections?

In the context of the European elections, there is likely to be an increase in the amount of foreign disinformation circulating in Germany, among other things. Disinformation is false or misleading information that is intentionally distributed. In the context of foreign information manipulation and interference, false information could be spread via fake social media accounts or websites of individuals, political parties, media companies or authorities, for example. In addition, images and audio and video files manipulated using artificial intelligence (known as "deepfakes") could be used with the aim of influencing public opinion.

We should also expect potential cyberattacks. These include, for example, what are known as hack-and-leak operations, in which data and information are stolen from the political sphere and released into the public domain, in some cases after manipulation of their content.

What is the Federal Government doing to protect the European elections from illegitimate foreign influence?

The Federal Ministry of the Interior and Community is responsible for coordinating the protection of the European elections in Germany against hybrid threats, including disinformation.

The task force against disinformation provides a forum for in-depth discussion across the different ministries and authorities. This involves particularly close coordination of discussions with the security authorities, the Federal Chancellery, the Federal Foreign Office and the Press and Information Office of the Federal Government regarding the threat situation and the measures aimed at protecting the European elections in Germany. The authorities exchange their respective knowledge and react accordingly. **In this way, potential foreign interference operations aimed at influencing the European elections can be systematically detected and warded off.** The task force also coordinates closely with the office of the Federal Returning Officer and with the Federal Agency for Civic Education.

The Federal Office for Information Security supports candidates and political parties, among others, in matters of information security with a range of information, assistance and advisory services. **The Federal Returning Officer and all other electoral bodies are implementing a wide range of measures to ensure the security of the elections, with support from the Federal Office for Information Security.** In addition, various security mechanisms provided for in electoral law ensure that elections are carried out properly and protect against manipulation.

Prevention measures and reinforcing resilience at all levels of government and in society as a whole are a particular priority for the Federal Government. Targeted work is carried out in all age groups to foster and consolidate media literacy.

Protecting the European elections is also a high priority at EU level. Dialogue with the providers of online platforms is also a key element of the approach to disinformation.

What can you do?

Think critically instead of just sharing

False or misleading news items, images and videos are often shared by private individuals not because they want to cause harm. But news items or images like this may help create uncertainty or spread panic. The more emotional or dramatic the content, the more often it is shared. That is why it is so important to remain calm and not to add to the confusion. Don't share content without checking it first. And don't share any content that seems questionable.

Check sources and senders

It is always helpful to check questionable content against at least two other sources. Current news is available from the established news media and daily and weekly newspapers and magazines. It is also helpful to look at the official website of any institution mentioned in a news item, as well as at the institution's social media channels.

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Use fact-checking services

There are numerous research institutions, non-governmental organisations and independent media organisations that pick up on news items and claims that are currently circulating and check them so that they can bring false information to light and correct it.

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